



TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE

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PRESS RELEASE

Work begins on Coastal Bend State Veterans Cemetery

Donated land will become hallowed ground in 18 months

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AUSTIN — Work began today on turning 54 acres of donated land into hallowed ground as hundreds of veterans joined Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson and numerous state, federal and local elected officials to break ground for the Coastal Bend State Veterans Cemetery.

Now an open field off Interstate 37, the site will soon become the final resting place for present-day Texas heroes.

Patterson, a retired Marine Lt. Colonel and Vietnam veteran, borrowed an invocation from a Navy rabbi to mark the occasion.

"Here lie officers and men, blacks and whites, rich men and poor - together," Patterson said, quoting U.S. Navy Lt. Roland B. Gittelsohn's dedication for the Fifth Marine Division Cemetery at Iwo Jima on March 21, 1945.

"Here are Protestants, Catholics and Jews - together. Here no man prefers another because of his faith or despises him because of his color. Here there are no quotas of how many from each group are admitted or allowed. Among these men there is no discrimination. No prejudices. No hatred. Theirs is the highest and purest democracy."

Today's groundbreaking was a much anticipated event for the Coastal Bend community, home to more than 45,000 veterans. The ceremony featured a number of dignitaries who've been actively involved in the cemetery project.

"When I look at these men and women who served our country with such devotion, I feel humbled and honored to be part of this project," Patterson said. "This will be a magnificent place of honor for Texas veterans and their spouses. They deserve nothing less."

The 54-acre site was donated by Flint Hills Resources and submitted by Nueces County to the Veterans Land Board.

"Flint Hills Resources is proud to be part of this public-private effort to ensure veterans have a lasting memorial," said Phil Gaarder, vice president and manufacturing manager

for Flint Hills Resources. "We salute the efforts of so many in this community, and all levels of government, who have worked tirelessly to see this idea become a reality."

Construction of the Coastal Bend State Veterans Cemetery is expected to take about 18 months and is funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

"I am so proud for Nueces County to be a working partner in the establishment of our veterans cemetery," said Nueces County Judge Loyd Neal. "We have more than 40,000 veterans in this area, and this final resting place will be a lasting tribute to their families and to those who served our country."

The Coastal Bend State Veterans Cemetery will have an ultimate capacity for up to 31,500 burials and interments of cremated remains. It will be developed in phases as needed. The initial construction phase will include 4,844 grave sites.

Among its features will be a committal shelter, a visitors center, a computer system for locating specific graves or interments, an attractive gateway entrance, a 60-foot flagpole, a paved assembly area for special ceremonies, an avenue of flags, several memorial walkways where future monuments will be placed, a memorial wall to honor those whose remains are not recovered or are buried elsewhere, and a columbarium for interment of cremated remains.

Since taking office in 2003, Patterson has overseen the greatest expansion of state veterans services since World War II, including the construction of the state's first three Texas State Veterans Cemeteries, which have been built in Killeen, Mission and Abilene.

These cemeteries complement the four VA national cemeteries in Texas, located in San Antonio, Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth and El Paso. There are no known plans for additional national cemeteries in Texas, and approximately 600,000 of Texas' 1.7 million veterans are 65 or older.

The Texas Veterans Land Board will own the Coastal Bend State Veterans Cemetery and operate it under VA guidelines with continued coordination of VA benefits available to veterans upon death.

All burial benefits entitled to eligible veterans, such as a burial flag, grave marker, Presidential Memorial Certificate, or military honors, may be used at Texas State Veterans Cemeteries. The Coastal Bend State Veterans Cemetery will coordinate with U.S. Department of Defense units or Veterans Service Organizations in nearby communities for military honors at burials.

Eligibility for a Texas State Veterans Cemetery is determined by VA regulations based on a variety of qualifying criteria, many of which may apply to a veteran's periods of service on active duty, or while in the Guard or Reserves. Regulations for eligibility can be reviewed at the VA website at <http://www.cem.va.gov> or by calling the VA's toll-free burial benefits number at (800) 827-1000.

The spouse or unmarried surviving spouse of an eligible veteran is also eligible for the program under current VA regulations.

A special Web page with information on the groundbreaking ceremony and future cemetery can be found at www.TexasVeterans.com. This Web page features electronic versions of the cemetery renderings and the overall layout of the future cemetery, photos of the future cemetery site and a fact sheet.

Gifts and grants of cash, benches, or organizational monuments can be accepted for Texas State Veterans Cemeteries. Please call Jack Slayton, Director of the Texas State

Veterans Cemetery Program at (512) 463-5977 if you would like to make a donation to a Texas State Veterans Cemetery.

For additional information on Texas State Veterans Cemeteries and other veterans programs offered by the Texas Veterans Land Board, call 1-800-252-VETS (1-800-252-8387), or visit the Veterans Land Board Web site at www.texasveterans.com .

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